

## 2014 Legislative Successes

Advocacy on behalf of Alaskans with disabilities and their families is one of the primary tenets of the Council and 2014 can be counted as one of the best years in terms of accomplishing our advocacy agenda. Before we list them we want to thank a few people and groups. We especially want to thank all the members of the Council's Legislative Committee, and its chairperson, **Dean Gates**. Also, we were blessed with one smart, no-nonsense, detail oriented legislative intern--**Hannah Foreman**, who kept us on track every single week and did so with a smile every step of the way. Of course, our legislative agenda was carefully shepherded through the process by staff that lined up testifiers and were always prepared to answer questions or find out answers on a moment's notice. Thank you **Christie Reinhardt**, **Rich Sanders**, and **Kristin Vandagriff**! Also, we could not have moved forward without the support and careful monitoring provided to us by the **Trust** and their advocacy coalition so ably staffed by **Teri Tibbets**, as well as the **Key Coalition** and their hired lobbyist, **Dave Parish**. We want to again thank our council liaison in the Legislature, **Rep. Charisse Millett**, who with her staff **Akis Gialopsos** and **Jeff Turner**, walked us through every step of the way during passage of HB 210, "Safe Students Act", and HB 211, "Employment First". They not only kept us informed through each progression of the bills, but their obvious passion for what these bills could do for Alaskans with disabilities and their families was always present. Finally, we want to thank all of you—the advocates that stepped up to the plate when asked to write or email your legislator, and those who took the time to call in to hearings or show up in Juneau or at an LIO to testify. Without your passion and commitment, none of this could have been possible.

Here is a list of what we think are the Legislative Successes for the Year:

- Update on Anchorage Taxicab and Limousine Service Ordinances- while not everything we want, and certainly not without some work left to do on the education and training front and the number of accessible cabs, we did

### **HB 278 repealed the High School Graduation Qualifying Exam (HSGQE)!**

The legislature went into special session in the early morning hours of April 21 and adjourned April 25. While the bill covers lots of issues affecting education in Alaska, the most important aspect for the Council is the repeal of the HSGQE! This has long been a priority of the Council. Not only is the exam abolished, but at the request of a student, a school district shall issue a high school diploma to a student who did not receive a high school diploma because the student failed to pass all or a portion of the secondary school competency examination but who received a certificate of achievement under the old law. Thank you for your diligent advocacy and support!

## **HB 361: ABA Licensing**

One of the most important elements in successful autism treatment is a well-trained behavioral therapists. The nationally-recognized credential for behavioral therapists is a Board-Certified Behavioral Analyst, or BCBA. Prior to passage of this bill, Alaskans with the BCBA credential cannot bill health insurance companies or Medicaid for their services at a rate that reflects their professional skill because they are not licensed.

HB 361 addresses this situation by providing for those holding the BCBA or BCaBA credentials in Alaska to be licensed by the Division of Professional Licensing, in the Alaska Department of Commerce, Community and Economic Development.

Read the engrossed version [here](#).

## **Complex Behavior Collaborative (CBC)**

The full \$525,000 in base funding for the CBC was approved by the legislature. Great job, advocates! It is your time, emails, phone calls, and testimony that made this a reality!

See the GCDSE position paper on the CBC [here](#).

*Background:* The Complex Behavior Collaborative (CBC) provides intensive support and intervention to individuals at risk of being removed from their community and placed in an institution.

## **HB 211: The Employment First Bill**

HB 211 is awaiting transmission to the Governor for his signature.

Many thanks to the advocates who have testified, spoken with legislators, and sent emails to gain the support this bill needed. Representative Millet and her staff have been diligent in making this legislation successful. You can thank her and her staff [here](#).

Read the passed version of [HB 211](#).

See the GCDSE position paper [here](#).

*Background:* This bill relates to the education and employment of individuals with disabilities. Under this act, gainful employment in an integrated setting at or above minimum wage must be considered the first and preferred outcome in the provision of services for individuals with disabilities.

## **HB 210: Safe Student Act**

On Saturday the Senate unanimously passed HB 210, ensuring that all Alaskans schools will soon have policies on restraint and seclusion and every district will have staff trained in de-escalation techniques. Thank you, advocates, for your testimony and communication with lawmakers. Your stories and advocacy convinced every senator and representative to vote in favor of the bill!

Read the engrossed bill [here](#).

*A note from the intern:*

*It's been a pleasure working with GCDSE this past year. With the legislative session complete and my internship ending, this is the final legislative update. Enjoy your summer! –Hannah Foreman*

### **Legislation of Interest to Key Coalition:**

HB 210: Restraint & Exclusion Bill. HB 210 passed the Senate in the final days of the session on a unanimous vote, and now goes to the Governor for signature into law.

Complex Behavioral Collaborative: the operating budget consideration of this item is now complete, and the Legislature has funded the CBC at \$525K in general funds!

HB 211: Employment First Bill. HB 211 passed the entire Legislature, and will now go to the Governor for signature into law.

HB 232: Disability designation on ID & License Plates Rep. Steve Thompson. HB 232 died in the House State Affairs Committee.

HB 361: Rep. Saddler's bill passed the Legislature. HB 361 establishes a new process for licensing of behavior analysts which is important to the implementation of the Autism insurance mandate from two years ago and for the CBC as well. Premera attempted to use the bill to gut the autism insurance mandate passed by the Legislature and supported

***Operating and Mental Health Budgets (HB 266 and HB 267) are awaiting transmittal to the Governor. Here are the results of Conference Committee items we were tracking:***

#### **Behavioral Health Grants**

The Conference Committee decided to accept the Senate recommendation of maintaining funding (no cuts, no increases) for Behavioral Health Grants, which funds substance abuse treatment services in Alaska. However, the funding sources were recommended to be as follows: \$1,241,500 (GF/MH) (DHSS) and \$801,500 (FedReceipts).

#### **Senior Community-Based Grants**

The Conference Committee accepted the Senate recommendation of adding to the existing budget \$545,000 (\$345,000 GF, \$200,000 GF/MH) (DHSS) for the state's Nutrition, Transportation and Support Services Grant Program. This program provides grant funding for non-profit agencies who provide meals (in groups and private homes), nutrition and health information, and transportation services that enable seniors to maintain mobility and independence.

#### **Suicide Prevention**

The Conference Committee accepted the Senate recommendation of \$60,000 (GF/MH) (DHSS) to the Suicide Prevention Council for Suicide Prevention and Postvention Curriculum Development, Training, and Implementation.

#### **FASD Media Campaign**

The Conference Committee accepted the Senate recommendation of adding \$500,000 (GF/MH) (DOR) for a Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD) media campaign.

#### **Supporting Health Care Access Through Loan Repayment Program (SHARP)**

The Conference Committee accepted the Senate recommendation of adding back \$985,500 (GF) (DHSS) to restore a portion of the cut recommended by the House of Representatives. The net result is a \$214,500 (GF/MH) cut to the existing program. SHARP addresses the shortage of certain health care professionals by increasing the number and improving the distribution of healthcare professionals who provide direct patient care. The program seeks to recruit and retain health care professionals to ensure Alaskan citizens have access to healthcare services. SHARP clinicians serve in every region of the state.

#### **Legislative Intent Relating to a Recidivism Plan**

The Conference Committee accepted the House recommendation of adding intent language that asks several state departments to collaborate with the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority, Alaska Housing Finance Corporation, and Alaska Court System to identify common clients who are being released from correctional institutions, and develop a plan that would result in increased access to community services (such as substance use and mental health treatment, employment, and housing), with the goal of reducing correctional system recidivism rates. The language is as follows:

LEGISLATIVE INTENT. It is the intent of the legislature that the Departments of Corrections, Health and Social Services, and Labor and Workforce Development, along with the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority, Alaska Housing Finance Corporation, and the Alaska Court System, continue to work collaboratively to identify common clients who are being released from correctional institutions and do the following:

1. Develop and implement a comprehensive, complementary, non-duplicative plan for providing substance abuse, mental health, housing and employment services to those who are released from correctional institutions.
2. Use the plan to assist the Departments, Authority, agency, and Court System in improving treatment and other outcomes for recently released inmates with the goal of reducing correctional system recidivism rates.
3. Gather and analyze data on the substance abuse, mental health, employment and housing services needed and the services provide to the released clients.
4. Propose effectiveness and efficiency measures for the new plan.
5. Jointly report on plan implementation and data findings to the legislature by February 2, 2015.

#### ***Additional Conference Committee items of interest to Trust beneficiaries:***

##### **Alaska Heating Assistance Program**

The Conference Committee settled on a Senate recommendation to maintain funding for the Alaska Heating Assistance Program, however the funding sources were changed to \$1 million (UGF) and \$1 million (FedReceipts) (DHSS). This program provides support for paying home heating expenses, including households with elderly or disabled members. It also helps pay utility deposits when households are moving into Section 8 or subsidized rental housing where heat is included in the rent.

##### **Mat-Su Aging and Disability Resource Center (ADRC)**

The Conference Committee denied a Senate request to provide a one-time \$200,000 (GF) grant (DHSS) to the Mat-Su ADRC. The resource center assists seniors and vulnerable

adults in accessing services, supporting and fostering independence, and maintaining personal choice. The center assists in understanding and accessing Medicare, Medicaid, Social Security, Veteran's benefits, community resources, options counseling, short and long term care options, etc.

#### **Alaska Youth First**

The Conference Committee accepted the Senate recommendation to add back a portion of a full cut recommended by the House. The Senate recommendation of adding \$1.4 million (GF) offers a net result of a \$991,700 cut to a \$2,391.7 budget. The Alaska Youth First Program provides career guidance for youth 14-24 years, including working in middle and high schools to create industry awareness, basic employability skills, work experience, applied academic training, teacher-industry externships, and school-to-apprentice or pre-apprenticeship opportunities.

#### **Alaska Learning Network Grants**

The Conference Committee settled on a compromise between the House and Senate recommendations. The final numbers remove the AKLN from the base budget, but add back \$850,00 (GF) (DEED) as a one-time increment (OTI). Intent language asks UAS and DEED to work together to make AKLN "self-sustainable" and report their progress to the legislature, and "ensure the coursework reduces the need for remediation" for certain students. AKLN provides statewide online learning and professional development for Alaskan students and teachers through distance courses, on-site and off-site support, coaching and training. AKLN is part of a coalition of 54 Alaskan school districts managed by University of Alaska Southeast and the AKLN n advisory board.

#### **Statewide Mentoring Program**

The Conference Committee settled on a \$700,000 (GF) (DEED) in reduction to the Alaska Statewide Mentor Project(?), which provides individualized support to first- and second-year teachers using practices that accommodate diverse academic needs and cultural backgrounds of both rural and urban students.

#### **Office of Children's Services Workload Study**

The Conference Committee accepted the Senate's recommendation to include \$103,500 (GF) (DHSS) to implement the 2012 Office of Children's Services Workload Study.

#### **Tribal Assistance Programs**

The Conference Committee settled on increasing funding \$500,000 (GF) (DHSS) to Tribal Assistance Programs under Public Assistance.